

Sketch of Morgan L. Martin /

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SKETCH OF MORGAN L. MARTIN.

BY THE EDITOR.

Morgan Lewis Martin. son of Gen. Walter Martin, was born in Martinsburgh, Lewis county, New York, on the 31st of March, 1805. In 1824 he graduated from Hamilton College, at Clinton, New York. For two years, he studied law with Collins and Parish, in Lowville, N. Y., and in 1826 went to Detroit then the chief city of the Northwest. There he entered Henry S. Cole's law office and was soon afterwards admitted to the bar. His residence in Detroit lasted but a few months, and in May, 1837, acting under the advice of his cousin, James Duane Doty,¹—who was then seeking to have the Territory of Huron erected by congress, with Green Bay as the seat of government,—took up his home in Green Bay, where he resided until his death, “one of the most conspicuous and distinguished among that band of pioneer settlers who early gave a national reputation to Wisconsin.”² From 1831 to 1835, he was a member of the legislative council of Michigan Territory, and from 1838 to 1844, one of the territorial council of Wisconsin. In 1845–47, he represented his Territory, with marked ability, in congress.³ He was president of the state constitutional convenience

¹ It was not generally known that Doty and Martin were cousins, the former being the latter's senior by six years. Doty's mother was a sister of Gen. Walter Martin. When her husband, Chillus Doty, died, October 16, 1824, she went to live with her brother, until the latter's death in Martinsburgh, December 10, 1834. The young men were reared in the same neighborhood,—the elder Martin being the village postmaster, and the elder Dory the innkeeper,—and were always close friends. James D. Dory had moved to Detroit in 1818 and to Green Bay in 1823.— Ed.

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2 *Fathers of Wisconsin*, p. 241.— Ed.

3 “In September, 1845, Mr. Martin was elected territorial delegate to congress over James Collins, whig, and E. D Holton, “liberty,” candidates. He took his seat as delegate in the 30th congress on the first Monday in December of the same year, and served until 1847. He proved an active and influential representative. During his term Mr. Martin introduced a bill to create the Territory of Minnesota. The name “Minnesota” is, as is well known, the Indian name for the St. Peter’s river. Mr. Martin got it, as he only recently told the writer, from Joseph Brown, who had been with him in the Wisconsin territorial legislature. Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the committee, reported the bill with the amendment that the name of the proposed territory be changed to “Itasca.” Mr. Martin contended for the name he had selected and succeeded in having it retained in the bill, which passed the lower house. In the senate, Senator Woodbridge, of Michigan, opposed the bill on the ground that there were no people in the proposed territory, and it was defeated. The same bill passed at the next session of congress, and the Territory of Minnesota, as originally projected and named by Mr. Martin, was created.”— (Dwight I. Follett, in *The Green Bay Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1887.)— Ed.

381 of 1847–48, and both in the chair and on the floor was one of the guiding spirits of the body which framed the charter under which the commonwealth of Wisconsin still operates. In 1855, he was elected a member of the state assembly, and three years later was sent up to the senate. Throughout the entire period of the War of the Rebellion, he served as an army paymaster. He was appointed United States Indian agent in 1866, holding the position until 1869, when the war department took charge of Indian affairs, and was relieved by Capt. W. R. Bourne, U.S. A. In 1866 he was the candidate (under the Johnson movement) for congress from the old 5th district, being defeated by Philetus Sawyer. In 1870, he resumed the practice of law. In 1873, he was again elected to the assembly. From 1875, until the time of his death, he served as county judge of Brown county, and was from its first organization one of the most active of the vice-presidents of this Society.

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On the 25th of July, 1837, in Green Bay, Judge Martin was married to Elizabeth, daughter of the late Col. Melancthon Smith, U.S. A., and grand-daughter of Judge Melancthon Smith, who was a delegate from New York, in congress, in 1782–84, prior to the period of the constitution. Judge Smith was also a member of the New York convention of 1787 called to consider the advisability of accepting the United States constitution. He was a strong anti-federalist, and leader of the Clintonian majority in that body. 382 Hamilton recognized him as his most formidable opponent; and it was not until he manfully acknowledged himself convinced by Hamilton's masterly logic, that the Empire state was won to the Union. Six children were born do Judge and Mrs. Martin, viz.: Leonard Martin; Annie, died in 1861; Melancthon, died in infancy; Sarah; Morgan L., Jr., and Debbie. Mrs. Martin and four of their children survive to mourn the loss of husband and father.

In June, 1887, while a guest at "Hazelwood," the home of Judge Martin, I had frequent interviews with him regarding Wisconsin men and affairs, during his sixty years' residence here. The following narrative is the result. While the language and arrangement are in a great measure necessarily the editor's, the statements are those of the judge. The manuscript was sent to him for revision, in September, 1887, but the increase of infirmities incident to advanced age induced him to beg for further extension of time. He commenced work upon the MS., however, about the middle of November, and every few days took it up and added some note or explanatory sentence. During all this time, also, he was answering a running fire of questions by mail, relative to his recollections of other facts in early Wisconsin history, not touched upon in his narrative, but covered by matters included in this volume of *Collections*, much valuable material for the purposes of annotation being thereby contributed by him. The judge appeared to greatly enjoy this sort of thing, in a desultory way, but the idea of a continuous narrative rather depressed him with a sense of personal responsibility. He was an exceedingly modest man, and averse to crowding himself, or allowing himself to be crowded, before the public. For this reason his narrative does not include some interesting features which the readers of this volume would have liked to have had presented to them. He had a keen memory, at the time this narrative

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was jotted down, and would frequently digress into what the newspapers would call a “spicy,” though thoroughly good-humored and harmless, account of the inside workings of early statecraft in Wisconsin and the peculiarities of the men of affairs in the territorial period,— 383 but he would inevitably conclude with a request that no note be made of his conversation on this score. He felt that any such revelations on his part might possibly be misconstrued and wound the feelings of living descendants of the public characters of those days; and he “had no desire,” he frequently said, “to tell tales out of school.” Could Judge Martin have been induced to himself write more fully of his reminiscences of pioneer days in Wisconsin, he might have made a volume which would be treasured for all time as a rich legacy of historical material. Shorn as it is, however, the following narrative will be found to present much novel and entertaining matter, that will prove of enduring value to students of Wisconsin history.

Judge Martin, in a letter to me, November 25, answering some questions of fact, incidentally wrote that he was progressing favorably on the MS.; but added, in a rather sorrowful postscript: “An hour's talk with you would be worth a ream of memoranda.” Upon the evening of December 1, he again wrote, promising to return the MS. within a few days, and closing up a report of his negotiations on behalf of the Society, with Mrs. Otto Tank, of Fort Howard: that estimable lady—who donated the Tank library to the Society, in 1867— having willed to our art gallery, largely through his personal influence, a superb collection of oil paintings. On the morning of Friday, December 2, he had been at work upon the narrative, anti pausing to prepare for going to his office, down town, received a paralytic stroke which benumbed his right side. His son, Morgan L. Martin, Jr., enclosed his father's last letter to me with the sad endorsement that Judge Martin's active career had “undoubtedly now closed.” The MS. narrative followed this, within a few days, with the judge's readily recognizable interlineations upon the concluding page, showing that he had practically finished his corrections. He lingered until 4 P.M. of Saturday, December 10, 1887, when he passed away, his last work on earth being a labor of love for this Society, whose interests were ever so close to his heart.

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Judge Martin was a man of generous impulses, kindly 384 manner, keen wit, fine literary tastes and greatly enjoyed the comforts of his beautiful home in Green Bay, where he was the idol of his accomplished wife and daughters. The majority of those with whom he was associated during his long and active career in the public affairs of Wisconsin Territory have long ago passed away, so that a comparatively small number of the generation of to-day knew him with any degree of intimacy; but those who had thus known him mourned his death as that of a rare gentleman of the olden school. No one who has carefully studied the beginnings of Wisconsin's greatness can but recognize that all honor and praise are due the memory of master spirits like Martin, who moulded the nascent commonwealth intelligently and well.